Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food

Farm & Food Report

Communications Branch, Walter Scott Building
3085 Albert Street, Regina, Canada, S4S 0B1

Saskatchewan

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Log Number: 06-34-153
Week of August 21, 2006

"WHOLE BUNCHER" HELPS FARMERS AND THE ENVIRONMENT

A simple device that attaches to the back of a combine can help cattle producers keep their winter feed costs down, and help the environment, too.

"It was a pilot project for the province that proved to be successful," said Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food (SAF) Forage Development Specialist Lorne Klein.

In 2005, the Saskatchewan Soil Conservation Association obtained funding through the federal Greenhouse Gas Mitigation Program to obtain six specialized pieces of equipment produced by A.J. Manufacturing in Balzac, Alberta. SAF got involved in helping to set up the project.

The mechanism, called a "Whole Buncher," looks like a giant pitchfork that attaches to the back of a combine and collects crop residue, rather than having it spread across the field. When around 150 pounds of chaff and straw land on the tines of the device, it tips, the pile drops off, and it springs back into position.

"Instead of the crop residue being baled and hauled to the cattle, the piles are left in the field for the livestock to graze on during fall and winter," Klein explains. "This reduces the amount of fuel that would ordinarily need to be burned in the feed production process. As a result, it's a much 'greener' approach, and it reduces the input costs to the farmer."

Five of the six Whole Bunchers were provided to cattle producers to try out. The sixth went to the Western Beef Development Centre, a research farm near Lanigan.

"One of the concerns with this method of crop residue collection was how it might affect the crop on that field in the following year," said Klein. "But we've found that there really is no detriment."

He noted, "The producers testing the Whole Buncher grew crops afterwards with no problem, provided the piles are cleaned up reasonably well."

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However, Klein indicated there are a few considerations that farmers would have to take into account before using the device.

First, since cattle will be released to graze there afterwards, producers will want to use it on fields that are fenced or can be fenced.

Second, if there is relatively little snow during the winter, the field will require a water source.

Third, some form of shelter, be it bush, trees, a creek area, a portable windbreak or some other form of protection, will be needed if cattle are to remain there for a period of time.

With these measures looked after, the findings from the trial period showed the Whole Buncher can deliver positive benefits to Saskatchewan cattle producers, while reducing greenhouse gas emissions over the course of the crop year.

Farmers interested in obtaining more information on the benefits or cost of the device can contact A.J. Manufacturing at (403) 226-0767.

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For further information, contact:

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NOMINATIONS OPEN FOR CANADIAN AGRI-FOOD AWARDS OF EXCELLENCE

Do you know a Saskatchewan producer, business, organization or individual who has made an extraordinary contribution to agriculture? If so, why not put their name forward for a prestigious national honour?

Nominations are now being accepted for the Canadian Agri-Food Awards of Excellence.

The awards recognize outstanding achievement in five key areas that are vital to the continued success of the agricultural sector: environmental stewardship, innovation, export performance, agricultural awareness and education, and agricultural volunteerism.

The annual awards are sponsored by the federal department of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) and the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair (RAWF). This year, they will be presented at the 2006 Canadian Agri-Food Awards of Excellence Banquet, hosted by RAWF on November 6 in Toronto.

"This country has some pretty special people making significant contributions to the sector," awards co-ordinator with AAFC Brock King said. "These awards are a way to shine a spotlight on their achievements."

The awards have been handed out annually since 2001, but surprisingly, have never gone to anyone from Saskatchewan.

"It's something we'd love to see redressed," King said with a chuckle. "Given the innovative and vibrant agricultural sector in Saskatchewan, it would be terrific to have a nominee from the province finally break that drought this year."

Nomination forms, additional information on the awards, and specific criteria for each category are available on the AAFC website at www.agr.gc.ca under "Features," or by using the website's search function.

(more)

The deadline for nominations is September 8, 2006.

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JOB PROGRAM BECOMES POWERFUL RURAL YOUTH RETENTION TOOL

A major Saskatchewan hog producer is learning that you reap what you sow when it comes to youth retention.

Big Sky Farms of Humboldt has an innovative summer job program that has created three dozen positions for young people looking for employment in their home communities.

"We know that a locally based job is a powerful tool for retaining young people in rural communities," said Big Sky Farms President and Chief Executive Officer Florian Possberg.

"We hope that, by creating a few dozen summer placements in our operations, we can contribute to sustaining the communities our barns operate in," he added. "At the same time, by offering students employment, we can identify potential employees and leaders of tomorrow."

That strategy is now starting to pay off.

Four of the summer placements have turned into full-time employees, and another summer student is considering a full-time job offer. In previous years, students who worked at Big Sky barns while pursuing a degree or diploma later chose to join the company full-time, returning to rural communities upon graduation.

"Some of them now include barn managers, training co-ordinators, senior production managers, herd health technicians and production technicians," explained Denys Robidoux, the Vice-President of Human Relations for Big Sky.

Thirty-four of the positions are in Saskatchewan communities, with the remaining two in southern Manitoba.

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Five local students have been hired at barns in the Porcupine Plain area. Another five are working at barns in the Rama district. Other communities in east-central Saskatchewan hosting Big Sky summer students are: Humboldt (two posts), Kelvington (two posts), Melville (one post), Preeceville (one post), Quill Lake (one post), St. Denis (two posts), Sturgis (one post) and Theodore (two posts).

Barns in central and western Saskatchewan account for 13 of the summer job placements. Three students (including one student who has become a full-time employee) are working at the Great West barn near Broderick. Another student is working in the Melville area, two have been placed in the Ogema facility, two are at Riverhurst, two are at Rosthern (including one full-time employee), one at Shaunavon and one at Strasbourg.

In addition to the local students who secure summer work at Big Sky operations, the company has also introduced the prairie farming lifestyle to students from Germany and France. This is the third year that the company has hosted a student from the Lycee College in France.

Students joining the Big Sky team undergo an intensive and wide-ranging student orientation and training program that includes an overview of the hog industry and where Big Sky, as the third largest hog producer in Canada, fits into the industry.

The orientation also covers production techniques and targets, as well as occupational health and safety rules, the company's management trainee program and career development opportunities within Big Sky Farms.

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"SHISHLIKI" ADDS SIZZLE TO BARBEQUES ACROSS SASKATCHEWAN

At times, 1978 seems like only yesterday to Terry Dennis.

That's the year he began working as a butcher in the family grocery store his father and uncle opened in Canora in 1947.

It's also the year he began experimenting with a traditional recipe for a marinated lamb dish known as "shishliki." The product quickly became one of the most popular items in the store, and Dennis knew he was onto something.

"It seemed to catch on pretty quickly with our regular customers and people from around town," he said. "Pretty soon, we had people coming into the store from all over asking for it."

Shishliki is a food of Russian origin, referring to marinated meat. Today, "Terry's Shishliki," as the product is marketed, can be found in many parts of Saskatchewan. Dennis estimates roughly 35 to 40 stores across the province have carried the product line over the years.

But its popularity hasn't remained a Saskatchewan secret. "We've had people come into the store to take packs of shishliki back with them to places like Victoria, Detroit, Toronto and all parts in between," he said.

"I've even custom-shipped a few packs out to some far-away destinations. My shishliki has done more traveling than I have," Dennis added with a chuckle.

Shishliki can be cooked like any other meat at any time of year, but by far the most popular method of preparation is on the barbeque. As a result, with numerous lake resorts surrounding Canora, it's the summertime that keeps Dennis the busiest.

The business began taking its shishliki show on the road in 1990, doing custom cookouts for various functions. Since then, Dennis estimates he has served hundreds of family reunions, weddings, staff barbeques, farmer appreciation days and the like.

(more)

"This is now one of the busiest parts of our operation," he said. "This summer alone, we're booked for 25 to 30 cookouts."

One of the highlights in Dennis' business career came in the early 1990s, when a shishliki booth he operated at Canadian Western Agribition in Regina was featured as one of the most popular booths at the show.

Today, Dennis and his brother Gerald continue to own and operate the family grocery store. While making a go of a business in a rural community can be challenging at times, Dennis says that finding a niche market with a specialty product has helped them immensely.

"If we didn't do this kind of diversification, we probably wouldn't be here today," he said.

Over the years, Dennis has continued to experiment and add new products to his shishliki line. Pork, chicken and beef shishliki can now be found in addition to lamb. Different flavours of meat, such as honey garlic pork and soya citrus chicken, have also been added.

"It's a value-add for us, and it's a value-add for the farmers who produce the product we use," he said. "Many of them are also our customers, so it's a win-win situation that we like a lot."

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LENTILS OFFER FARMERS A POSITIVE OPTION

Lentils are a pulse crop with a long history world-wide, and a particularly promising future in Saskatchewan.

A member of the legume family, lentils were first grown in southwest Asia around 7,000 B.C.

Commercial production in Western Canada began in 1970 with just a few acres, but has taken off substantially from there.

Today, Canada is one of the world's leading lentil producing and exporting countries.

Ray McVicar, provincial crop specialist with Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food, pointed out that the pulse crop has become increasingly popular with producers in this province. In 2006, 580,000 hectares (1.4 million acres) were seeded to lentils across Saskatchewan.

"Lentils have a number of qualities that make them well-suited to production in Saskatchewan," McVicar said. "They are best adapted to cooler temperate zones, and grow well in brown and dark brown soil types."

He adds, "More importantly for producers, lentils can help to improve their economic returns, diversify and lengthen their crop rotations, and reduce their requirement for nitrogen fertilizer."

Lentil production is particularly successful in rotation with cereal grains, since its rooting depth is much shallower than that of crops like wheat. As a result, moisture found in deeper ranges of the soil remains untapped by the lentil roots, leaving it in place for cereal grains to extract in the following year to boost yields and protein content.

McVicar noted that lentils do have some drawbacks, however. Most notably, they are susceptible to certain types of diseases and are a poor competitor with weeds. Producers must therefore consider these factors when planning their crop rotations and crop protection programs in a given year.

(more)

"Research is presently going on to develop improved red and green lentil varieties, and to determine the best agronomic practices for lentil production in Saskatchewan," McVicar said. "More information is becoming available all the time, especially with respect to red lentils, as production shifts to better match world demand."

Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food has prepared a document for farmers interested in learning more about the qualities, benefits and production of the pulse crop. Recent updates include information on lentils with the Clearfield trait and procedures for harvesting red lentils.

The document, entitled *Lentil in Saskatchewan*, is available electronically on the department's website at www.agr.gov.sk.ca (under the Crops category), or in hard copy by calling the Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food Agriculture Knowledge Centre at 1-866-457-2377.

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